

Romans 15:22-33

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Open up your Bibles to Romans. For those who may be joining us today, we've been going through the book of Romans for quite some time now.

We're getting towards those latter chapters, but as has been mentioned already today, we just believe that what you need to hear and what God's people need to hear is the Scripture. We need to hear God's Word, not man's. We don't need to have a good Word. We need the Word. And so that desire, we usually preach verse by verse through different books of Scripture and letting the Holy Spirit use the Word of God to apply it to our hearts.

And so we've been moving through Romans. If you would like to catch up, all the sermons are online on our website. But we're getting to these latter chapters of Romans. Chapter 15 is where we will be today.

And we're talking about, in chapter 15, Paul's explaining his mission to the Gentile people, the non-Jews in the Roman world, and spreading the Gospel and planting churches in the Gentile world for the glory of God.

[1:12] So today, we will be starting in verse 22 and going all the way down to the end of chapter in 33.

But Paul mentions here that his plan is to eventually come to the Romans, because he actually had never been to Rome before. And from there, go on to Spain.

But before any of that happens, he mentions that he first must go to Jerusalem. And so, all these things will kind of be. But we're going to unpack the text today mainly with two questions.

And to save us time, we'll just eat it bit by bit. But the first question, we'll see in verses 22 through 29. But what are Paul's plans?

What are Paul's plans? So let's read together in verse 22. He says, Bringing aid to the saints.

[2:41] For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them.

For if the Gentiles have come to share in the spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When, therefore, I have completed and have delivered to them what has been collected, I will leave for Spain by way of you.

I know that when I come to you, I will come in fullness of the blessing of Christ. So, I thought the best way to kind of walk through this would be chronological.

Because he kind of says like, I'm here now, but I'm going to come to you. But first I'm going to go to this. And sort of goes back and forth. So, in my brain I'm trying to like establish like where did he actually go first and move out from there.

So, we see clearly that one of his plans is, because he's currently in Corinth writing to the Romans, his plan is to go to Jerusalem first.

[3:52] You see that in verse 26. But, so before he comes to Rome, he plans to bring a collection that he's been gathering from all the Gentile churches. All the churches that he has planted and been a part of and ministered to.

He's been collecting money, gifts, supplies, and order to bring it to the believers who were in Jerusalem because they were not doing well.

They were struggling financially. They were poor. They needed assistance. And so, Paul basically says, he picks up this major theme of the letter. This isn't just an example of what Christians should do to show generosity.

If you picked up on this, it's a main theme in his letter. That is the debt that Gentile believers owe to their Jewish roots. You see that in chapter 11, verse 8.

In chapter 15, 8 and 9. So, he says that these churches like Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

[4:56] And he says, indeed, they owe it to them. For the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings. So, meaning like the truths of the gospel that were preached to the Gentiles by Jewish apostles, by Jewish prophets, teachers, and so on.

They ought also to serve in the material blessings. So, this gift that he's going to take to Jerusalem comes from many different churches. Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, etc.

And also, he wants to gather some from the Romans in order to go and give to them. And you see that they're thankful to be a part of this work. They're not doing this begrudgingly.

They are blessed to take part in providing the needs and alleviating some of the suffering of their fellow Jewish believers there. So, these Gentiles and us, right, stand in debt to the Jews for the spiritual blessings of the Jewish people.

And so, they are joyful to share, like in that, assistance financially. I just thought it was interesting while I was studying this that Paul assumes that financial aid for needy Christians is just a normal part of the Christian life.

[6:09] He didn't have to make a huge argument for why they ought to. He basically is just saying, that's what we do. That's a part of how we live this Christian life by providing for the needs of fellow believers.

And he goes on by telling the Romans that that visit of, he asked them to support him in prayer. And he also is just trying to discourage any kind of division or infighting between Jews and Gentiles in the church.

He wants them to be unified. One, to put aside just that part of who they think they are and say, hey, you're part of something greater. You are the church. You are the believers.

And so, after he has collected that from these Gentile churches, he will go to Jerusalem, then to Rome, then to Spain.

So then, to Rome. This is his next part, if you notice that. He says, Paul planned for a while to go to Rome, but he had been hindered. He had been prevented. And he knew that at some point, God would eventually bring him to the imperial city, Rome.

[7:17] The seat, the most powerful place in the ancient world at this time, especially to the Gentile world. And so, he had been hindered from coming to see them, prevented primarily because of what he says prior to this, that his main goal was to plant churches in the unreached areas in the eastern part of the empire.

And so, that was his main objective. So, to plant churches and to preach the gospel in pivotal cities to where the gospel would go outward. Corinth, Thessalonica, Athens, etc.

And so, from there, he plans to go on to Rome itself. And remember, he wrote from Corinth. This was three years before he actually would go to Rome.

And it would be sort of a dream come true to him, really. But if you want to just... I mean, I don't have a lot of places for you to turn outside of our main text, but just flip over to the beginning of the book of Romans. Romans chapter 1.

Just to kind of pick up on this. But you can feel his desire and his love for the Roman believers. In chapter 1, we'll start in just verse 7.

[8:29] He goes, First, First, I thank my God, through Jesus Christ, for all of you, because of your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing, I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow, by God's will, I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

For I long, I yearn, I desire to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you. That is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

So, again, that desire he has here, he's hoping to soon realize and to be able to come to Rome itself. So you can go back to Romans 15.

Now we see, next, that in verse 24 and 28, that Paul mentions that after leaving Rome, his plan is to journey to Spain.

[9:45] to begin a fourth missionary trip. If you look in a lot of your Bibles, well, at least a lot of the ones that I've seen, they have little maps in the back, they have Paul's missionary journeys in the back.

Usually, you might just see three, but I'm pretty certain there was a fourth going on the way to Spain. Remember, if you look in chapter 15 again, that it was always Paul's desire to go to unreached peoples.

You see this in verse 20 and 21. He says, Lest I make it my ambition to preach the Gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build upon someone else's foundation, but as it is written, those who have never been told of Him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.

So, Paul was particularly gifted and directed by God to be a pioneer to go where the Gospel had not yet been taken yet.

Well, there was no Gospel, no church. The name of Jesus had not yet been heard. So, not necessarily to go to where there was already established churches. It was to go where there were no churches.

[11:03] And so, this makes his desire to go to new territory, particularly Spain, because, this is astounding, he had nowhere else to go in the eastern part of the empire.

Isn't that crazy? Like, he pretty much, you see his map and his head, he just checked it off. Like, been there, been there, the church is growing and flourishing here, and now he basically says, I've finished that.

So, now I look west to Rome and Spain. He plans to go on. The eastern Mediterranean had been somewhat reached.

But I think it's astonishing that in verse 23, he's basically saying, I'm finished. My work is done. There's no more places in these regions for me to go. My missionary task is complete.

So, praise the Lord. So, he's eager to go on to Rome and then to Spain. So, it's remarkable though that in 25 years of frontier mission work in the eastern Mediterranean, it was finished.

[12:02] Of course, there were still thousands and millions that hadn't been reached yet in those places, but it's not God's design for men like Paul to win everybody to Christ.

That's the job of local churches, local believers, local pastors, the job of an indigenous group where they are. So, I mean, just, to pause on this.

Are you aware of our collective responsibility to reach the lost around us? And are you aware of your personal responsibility to know, to live, to teach the gospel to unbelievers in the spirit that God has you in your school, in your place of work, your social circles?

your social circles? And very often, you know, I say this a lot up here, but it bears repeating because I know that if you were to go back to last week's sermon and then maybe even go back a month, how much of that have all of us put into practice in our lives with God's help?

But are unbelievers even on your radar at all? Or do you, quote, leave it to the professionals? Like, we're so professional. Not really. And do you, like, really desire to see the lost come to Christ?

[13:24] It isn't the job of men like Paul to reach everybody. So, therefore, Paul hopes to go to Rome to meet with the saints in the church there, and then he desires to use them as a base, ascending base, to go to Spain.

He says, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you. So, Spain, in the first century A.D.

was a firm and established part of the Roman Empire. I promise not to bore you the history, the ancient history part of me just wants to understand people don't get stoked about it as I do.

So, but, it's located on the far eastern side of the empire. It was called Tarshish in the Old Testament. Spain was a major center of commerce and culture and provided much in the way of prosperity and security for the Roman Empire.

For the military, it gave massive amounts of manpower, horses, and very important, this, like the, you ever heard of Spanish steel, the gladius expaniensis, the Roman sword that they used in the

legions was made from Spanish steel.

[14:36] They had substantial crops for the empire to feed the empire. And a lot of well-known Romans in history came from Spain. Seneca, the great philosopher and statesman who infamously tutored Nero, failed at that.

he actually said it's something pretty cool. Like, you know, there's a lot of cool things that he said, but this shows that common grace is a real thing. A wise man never asks what another man serves, for only his actions will speak the truth.

And so, he was one, Seneca, also some emperors, including Trajan, who expanded the empire to its greatest length.

And so, it was very critical to Paul that he goes there because that was a very epicenter in a lot of ways of the Roman empire. So, strategic location for Paul to go and evangelize and plant the church.

So, you see, his plans are going to go to Jerusalem, then I'm going to go to Rome, and then I'm going to go to Spain. Alright? But, this is question number two. Did God allow Paul to accomplish his plans?

[15:51] Now, some of us have this idea that Paul would just, you know, just get him to work himself into some kind of spiritual frenzy and God would just speak to him in a vision about where to go.

That did happen, but usually, Paul, just like us, he used his wisdom, he used what he knew about life, and he made decisions. God did, on occasion, direct him, but Paul is aware, very aware, of a huge truth that we need to grasp.

It says in Proverbs 16, 9, the heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps. We make our plans, but at the end of the day, we're not sovereign, we're not omnipotent, and God directs our steps.

Right? It goes on, there's other Proverbs. Proverbs 19, 21, many are the plans in the mind of a man. That surprises some women. There's many plans in our heads, right?

But, it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. So, we make these thoughts, we have these plans, but God's purpose stands.

[17:03] True? Yes. Mysterious? Yes. But the Bible writers fully knew that as they planned and went about their daily lives, they believed that their entire lives fell under God's sovereign rule and His providence.

and they even confess, Proverbs 20, 24, a man's steps are from the Lord. How then can man understand his way?

So, we are told about this in the Scripture and we can't fully grasp it or understand it, but we make plans and we offer them up to God and ask that He would use them as He sees fit, but ultimately they are in His hands.

And Paul was very aware of this. And so, he often uses tentative phrases. He goes, he said in Acts 15, verse 28, it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to do this.

And to the Corinthians he wrote, for I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend time with you if the Lord permits. So, meaning that he had these plans but he submitted them to God's sovereignty.

[18:13] So, are you humbled by that spiritual reality? Because Paul definitely was. Do we acknowledge God and seek Him in the making of our plans? Or do we ignore Him if He's not really a part of the equation?

Very careful. We need to be very careful there. And so, what happened? What happened to all these different trips that he had planned? Let's just unpack them. Alright? So, did Paul make it to Jerusalem?

Yes, he did. Read about it in Acts. And so, Paul made it to Jerusalem. He was warned ahead of time before he went to Jerusalem in Acts 21.

Agabus prophesied that if you go there, I say by the Holy Spirit that you will suffer. Like, you're going to be, you know, in great persecution there. And so, Paul said, basically, like, I'm ready to go and I'm ready to die for Jesus.

I don't really care. So, even if he was warned, I mean, I want you all to just stop and think about that. Like, let's say that God, by some crazy chance, revealed to you what would happen to you if you went to a certain place.

[19:22] Your thinking would be, well, if it would go well, then I would go there. Right? But Paul, this was sort of mind-blowing. That suffering awaited him there. And he still went.

This was sort of mind-blowing. Even when God did give him a glimpse of the future, he didn't run from it. He went towards it. So, he suffered greatly in Jerusalem.

He was eventually attacked by a large mob and they accused him of breaking their law. And he addressed the mob and basically shared his testimony and the gospel with them.

And they rejected him. And then they went on to try to scourge him, which wouldn't be new to him. But, this is very rare that Paul usually does this.

I think he only does it if it will serve God's purpose. Not out of a selfish reason to escape pain. But, he's about ready to be scourged in that there's a Roman centurion next to him.

[20:20] And he goes, hey, is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen before he is condemned? So, the centurion's like, oh, shoot.

And he went to the tribune and said, what do you want to do? This man is a Roman citizen. So, meaning it's against the law for us to just scourge him without a trial. Like, he has to be under Roman law.

So, they were in kind of a panic. So, Paul was eventually in prison when he was in Jerusalem. But, as a Roman citizen, he could appeal to Caesar for a final trial.

So, that's what led him on to Rome. So, next to Paul, did God allow Paul to make it to Rome?

Again, the answer is yes. Three years after writing them, Paul's plan to come to Rome was finally realized.

And, however, not in the way he intended. he went, not as a, quote, free man, but as a prisoner. He walked up the Via Appia for five days to Rome.

[21:24] And, it had been a long, crazy journey to get there, which you can read about in Acts. Very difficult. But, as he even, before he was even in the city itself, there were believers coming out to greet him.

And, I think that that's like so encouraging. A place that he had never been. There were believers.

And, they were coming out to meet Paul as he came toward the city gate. of Rome itself.

God had remained faithful to him. He said, you must, you will testify in Rome. That's what God told him. So, God was keeping his word and following through. So, as was his style when he got to Rome, he sought out the Jewish population and began sharing with them.

They had the scriptures. They had the knowledge. And, it says that some believed and most, but most rejected. And so, but he didn't give in too easily. It actually says in Acts that he went on from morning to evening expounding the scriptures to them.

So, when's the last time any of us ever did that? So, all night, all day, he's like sharing the scriptures, sharing the gospel with these Jews. But then, again, as was his way, he kind of turned that from the Jews to his undivided attention to reaching the Gentiles.

[22:37] So, a lot of this you have to kind of go outside and kind of understand what happened, but Paul's trial probably did not come for at least two years while he was in Rome.

It could do the fact that many cases were stacked up before his, or his was just not seen as that important enough to jump to the front of the queue of the emperor.

But, can you just imagine, that's why Paul's there in Rome. He's under house arrest. He hasn't tied to Paul for two years and what that was kind of like. But, that was not wasted time at all in God's sovereign plan.

During that time, God inspired many of the letters that we hold dear today. While he was in Rome, he penned Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon while he was here.

So, this wasn't wasted time while he was under house arrest. He's been passed down to us, survived, and in our hands today. In Paul's time under house arrest, he preached the gospel.

[23:40] In Acts 28, verse 30 and 31, it says, Paul lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So, on this first trip to Rome, we had this impression that he was just always in a dungeon. He actually lived as a Roman citizen under house arrest pretty comfortably and he could share the gospel with anybody who came to talk to him.

So, Roman law allowed him all these things. So, it's safe to assume that he just walked all over the city of Rome and shared Christ with all that he could even while he was under guard.

And so, he used that freedom well probably from 60 A.D. to 62 A.D. But, we don't really know what happened fully, but Paul's trial probably didn't come for two years and when it was heard, it was heard at the southeastern part of the Roman Forum and the emperor who at that time was Nero, he would hear very important cases, very important situations, but, as we know, for Nero, he wasn't really a great statesman, he kind of liked theater and music a lot better and not really dealing with serious matters and so, often, the less important things were delegated to the captain or the commander of the Praetorian Guard which was, you know, his personal bodyguard.

And so, it is very possible that Paul never appeared before Nero but that would have been a sight to see like the world's, one of the ancient history's greatest tyrants actually face-to-face with one of the greatest Christians.

[25:31] We don't know that that happened but, at any rate, Christianity as a whole was not really considered a threat by the empire at this time. At that time, it was not.

So, all evidence seems to point to him eventually being released and went on from there. The charges brought against Paul were infractions of the Jewish law as we see in Acts and not seen as a serious threat in the eyes of Rome at that time.

This is just sort of a sect of Judaism is what they thought. They didn't really consider it a big deal. Even in Acts 26, King Agrippa even said, this man might have been set free had he not even appealed to Caesar.

So, there's one reason to think that. There's no, when we read in Acts when Paul actually arrives in Rome, they didn't really even hear anything about him.

They were like, oh, well, we didn't know you were under arrest. So, word of that had not even reached them yet. Then secondly, under house arrest, Paul writes of his confident release.

[26:35] He's pretty sure that he'll be found innocent. He wrote to the Philippians, I hope therefore to send Timothy just as soon as I can.

and I trust that the Lord will shortly send me to you also. So, I mean, he's planning on eventually coming back to see the Philippians after his imprisonment.

So, he seems very confident in that release and for those reasons, it's pretty safe to assume that he wasn't found guilty and he was released from this sentence that he had.

So, that leads to the last question here. But, lastly, did Paul even make it to the western stretch of the Roman Empire, to Spain? Did he go there? Well, no visit of Paul is recorded in the New Testament, but it's highly possible he went there after his release.

There's some extra-biblical sources, historical evidence that say that Paul did go there. Twenty years after Paul went to Rome, Clement of Rome wrote, an early church father, Paul preached in the east and in the west.

[27:46] He won genuine glory for his faith, having taught righteousness to the whole world and having reached the farthest limits of the west, which at that time would be Hispania, Spain.

So, early church fathers wrote about Paul going there, and again, if he was released, why wouldn't he go there? Right? So, that's probably what happened. He went on to Spain.

This gets into the third and last question. I'll ask the Romans. This is verse 30 and 33. But how did Paul ask the Romans to pray for him?

Alright? You see this in verse 30? He says, I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will, I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen. So, he appeals to them, he calls them, he entreats them, by their mutual love for the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of the Holy Spirit, to pray with them.

[29:12] And first he asks, like, I know that I'm going to go to Jerusalem, and like, I'm asking for deliverance from all the persecution

that will be there.

And so, did God answer that prayer? It seems like he didn't, but he did, because they didn't kill him, they didn't put him to death. Their desire to do that was frustrated by God's sovereignty, but he did go on to Rome, just not the way he had intended, right?

We make our plans, but God directs our steps. So he did go to Rome, but not as a free man, but as a prisoner. God had his own way of sending him.

And so, in Acts 24, verse 17, it does suggest that the Jerusalem believers were thankful for that contribution. They were very grateful that Paul brought.

And then he asked for basically spiritual refreshment. Like, I want to come to you by God's will and meet these Roman Christians face to face and share fellowship with them, worship with them, eat together and laugh together and have great fellowship together.

[30:23] That was what he had prayed for. That sweet time in Rome, he would be refreshed by their company. me. And so, speaking as like from the point of the view of the Roman church that he's writing to, who are the saints that God uses to bring refreshment to your soul?

Encouragement and refreshment to the souls of your fellow believers? Or are you mostly taxing for people to be around? I feel that I can be that way sometime.

I want to ask God to help me be a source of refreshment for others. And then he ends with a benediction here. He says, finally closes by praying, may the God of peace be with you all.

Amen. So, just as we see in verse 13, God is the God of hope. He's also the God of peace to those who belong to His Son and put their trust in Him.

And so, in conclusion, it's very easy to be like, wow, this is just a lot of details. But, I've really tried to think through and pray what would be some good appropriate application for some of this.

[31:40] But, I think what came to my mind was Paul had finished his task. And, we read in John, if you want to join me there, we'll close there in just a second, but John 17, verses 4 and 5, this is when Jesus is praying to the Father.

And, this is a phrase that haunts me daily, and often can keep me awake at nights. And, I need to work on that in my own life.

But, Jesus prayed in John 17, verse 4, basically saying, Father, I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work that You gave me to do.

So, Jesus was fully and completely satisfied with accomplishing all the work that the Father had given Him to do on the earth.

And, with that approving conscience, that peace of mind, he then prayed, and now, Father, glorify me in Your presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed.

[33:06] So, Paul was able to say that with God's help, he had finished the task of planting churches in the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

By God's grace, he had done it. And so, from there, the gospel is going to go out to all these nations, to all these peoples. And at the end of his life, so, what happened eventually, we know, is that after this, after he was released from Rome the first time, he probably went on to Spain and did some other things.

But, when he came back again through Rome, persecution had started. And believers were being imprisoned and tortured and killed in the arenas.

And so, he is basically on death row in Rome. He was imprisoned officially. And he wrote in his letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy 4, 6, and 8, For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure has come.

Sounds like what Jesus said. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day.

[34:33] And not only to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing. So, Christ, said that he was going with a clear conscience and joy to the Father because he had accomplished the work that God had gave him to do on the earth.

Paul, likewise, I've accomplished the task of what God put me here to do. And so, what is it that God has specifically burdened you with, given you holy desire for, that when your hour comes,

whether it's by a natural death or unnatural, you'll be able to say that I have accomplished all that you gave me to do on the earth, and now I'm coming to you.

What would that be? What would it be? The confidence saying I'm coming to you, having accomplished that work for the sake of your name, I've finished the race, I've kept the faith. What holy ambition do you have? And one story I read about in 1906, there was a Scotsman named James Fraser.

He was studying engineering originally. He kind of planned just to make a career for himself and be prosperous in London. He was studying for engineer. And later, he became desirous and burdened to go to the unreached people at that time in the Yuan province of China.

[36:16] And he desired to go and do frontier missions and evangelism. And the turning point in his life when he was in college, and he read a two-penny pamphlet that had these two sentences in it.

If our master returned today to find millions of people un-evangelized and looked, as of course he would look, to us for an explanation, I cannot imagine what explanation we should give.

One, of the most certain thing that I am certain of, what excuses would we make before the Lord?

What are we accustomed to making in such good conscience now that we should be wholly ashamed of then? And so, sorry, that kind of moved me and I barely had a hard time reading it.

What excuses are we comfortable with now that we will be ashamed of on that day when the Lord comes? And my prayer for my life, and you can just pray for my peace of mind, I feel like I put too much burden, too much weight on myself to finish.

[37:36] I just have a very keen awareness that God has extended my life. He's doing that to all of us, but I'm just maybe more aware of that than some of you are. And so, I feel a burden to make good on what He has given me.

Not so I can earn salvation, but just because I want to honor Him. So, that's what Christ said, that's what Paul said. So, what is it in your life that you can say, I've accomplished the work, I've finished the task that He's put me on the earth to do?

And with that, let's pray together.